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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [SA](#) [IS](#) [TU](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: CARDINAL SAYS SAUDI ARABIA SHOULD PERMIT CHURCHES, DECRIES
FEAR OF MUSLIMS IN EUROPE

REF: A. A. VATICAN 137
[1](#)B. B. VATICAN 135
[1](#)C. C. 08 VATICAN 87
[1](#)D. D. 09 BERN 513

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CLASSIFIED BY: Julieta Valls Noyes, DCM.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)
Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The Vatican's interfaith Czar, Cardinal Jean Louis Tauran, renewed his call for all societies to recognize freedom of religion in a recent press interview. Tauran also asked for concrete measures that move interfaith relations from mere tolerance to harmonious coexistence of peoples of different faiths. For that, he said, participants in interfaith dialogue must ensure that what they are doing institutionally is publicized to and embraced at the grassroots. As a case in point, Tauran attributed Swiss voters' decision to ban minarets to ignorance. His recently concluded trip to Indonesia, however, was an example of positive engagement at every level.

Tauran's comments underline the Vatican's focus on tangible results from formal inter-religious dialogues, particularly with Muslims, and especially in the area of religious freedom.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Collaboration with the Vatican on select interfaith issues can advance the USG goal to have faith-based organizations from the world's major religions cooperate with each other and with the USG to attain specific, action-oriented results (see paragraph 8). End Summary.

Freedom to Worship is Not Freedom of Religion

[1](#)3. (SBU) In a January 5 interview with the Vatican daily, "L'Osservatore Romano," Cardinal Tauran drew distinctions between freedom of religion and freedom of worship. Freedom of religion should entail a partnership of different religious

groups in public life, and should become a civil right recognized by law in all societies. Freedom of worship, he implied, is often limited to tolerance of religious minorities. Tauran lamented that Saudi Arabia, unlike some other Gulf countries, continues to deny the almost two million Christians in the country a church to celebrate the sacraments -- a violation of freedom of worship, not to mention freedom of religion. In the same way that it is important for Jews and Muslims to have synagogues or mosques, he said, Christians need churches. He said that it was intolerable for Christian places of worship to be reduced, in some Islamic countries, to museums.

(Note: Tauran did not name names in the interview, but the Vatican is upset that a shrine at the site of Saint Paul's birth is now a Turkish government museum. The Vatican is also concerned about the future of Christian sacred sites in Israel. End note).

Solemn Declarations Not Reaching the Grassroots

¶4. (U) Tauran said a lack of "reciprocal understanding" is the main obstacle to better inter-faith relations at the grassroots level. Reflecting on the impact of the first Catholic-Muslim Forum held in November of 2008 (ref. C), Tauran said "It is no small feat to have Muslims and Christians come together and affirm that men and women are equal in dignity, that everyone has a right to practice his own religion in private and public, that religious symbols should be respected, and that religion can not be used to justify terrorism or fundamentalism." However, he worried that the significance of the joint final statement did not reach the grassroots because of the reluctance of some Arab media to cover the meeting.

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Swiss Vote Shows Europeans are Ignorant about Islam

¶5. (U) Ignorance and groundless fear are behind Swiss voters' decision to ban construction of new minarets in their country (ref. D), according to Tauran. The Cardinal rhetorically asked if voters had actually met with Muslims or opened a copy of the Koran. At the same time, Tauran said Muslim immigrants should aim to integrate themselves as best they could within European society and culture. He thought it was possible for Muslims in Europe to maintain their religious principles while recognizing the difference between civil law and religious precepts and the separation of religion and state. Europeans, he said, also should seek to engage Muslims to better understand Islamic culture.

Good Reviews for Indonesia Trip

¶6. (U) Tauran was positive about his recent trip to Indonesia. He thought the country's constitutional principle of "pancasila" - belief in one God, a just and civilized humanity, national unity, democracy and social justice - was key to religious harmony because people of different faiths all recognized their own belief systems in it. Christians made up only 3 percent of the Indonesian population, but incidents of religious

intolerance and Islamic fanaticism were rare. There are fifteen Catholic universities in Indonesia, which enrich the country's educational landscape. Tauran said that he had urged local Catholic bishops to devote at least one Sunday a year to inter-religious dialogue. He had also called on the Indonesian authorities to re-visit school texts that had erroneous descriptions of Christianity.

Comment: Opportunities for Cooperation with the US

¶17. (C) Inter-religious dialogue has been an element of the Holy See's international engagement for more than forty years. The Vatican's objective since Tauran took charge of the Pontifical Council on Inter-religious dialogue has been for dialogue to produce tangible results. From his vantage point as a career Vatican diplomat, Tauran initially focused on inter-religious dialogue mostly as a vehicle to advance the Vatican's top foreign policy goal -- advancing religious freedom. This made him a "hawk" among the Vatican Curia engaging Muslims. Lately, however, he has become more receptive to education and better mutual understanding at the grassroots level as key goals for interfaith dialogue.

¶18. (C) Beyond education for mutual understanding and promoting religious freedom, the third, as yet less developed pillar of the Vatican's interfaith engagement is cooperation on specific goals. These include topics like promoting world peace or protecting the environment. As discussed in ref. A, the U.S. can engage actively with the Vatican on all three pillars of its interfaith strategy.

¶19. (C) In addition, Embassy contacts who follow interfaith dialogues note that Christian-Muslim dialogue also fosters intra-faith understanding. The Muslim side of the Catholic-Muslim Forum is itself a venue for Sunni and Shia Muslims to reach common positions vis-a-vis the Vatican. As most victims of Muslim extremism around the world are Muslims themselves, inter-religious dialogue's ability to reduce intra-faith tension in Muslim majority countries could be significant. Embassy Vatican stands ready to support efforts to participate in and/or broadly disseminate the outcomes of interfaith meetings.

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